

# Scottish Sangha Newsletter

No. 7 - September 2025

*Welcome to the seventh edition of the newsletter for everyone practising in the Plum Village tradition in Scotland*

## *Index:*

- p1: Welcome from Jane Ellen Combelic
- p2: What's coming up in Scotland
- p3: Retreats and a new Wake Uo group
- p4: Abenhall is blessed
- p5: The Monastic Visit to Scotland earlier this year
- p6: North Star Sangha – from Maggie Dove
- p7: Poems from Margot Henderson
- p8: A poem from James Lang Smith, & the next Newsletter

## *Welcome from Jane Ellen Combelic*

Dear Friends,

In this rather old photo, you can see that I do love words! (Roland says be careful what you put on the internet...) So, I'm pleased to write the editorial for this issue of our Scottish Sangha newsletter.

As gorgeous summer gives way to crispy autumn, I give thanks for the beauty of this land. I emigrated to Scotland from the U.S. fifteen years ago and it still feels a privilege to live here. The fields around our cottage in the Laich of Moray lie fallow and golden, the luminous green trees take on sombre tones, the rain falls again after an unusual spell of dry weather. We are blessed.

I also feel blessed by the miracle of sangha. For decades before I discovered sangha, I meditated on my own, kneeling in my living room before going to work. That all changed after a retreat with Thay in Colorado, when we were put in families by geographical location. Thus I found myself, week after week, sitting with Peaceful Hearts Sangha in Fort Collins, shy and anxious. But then I started to see that, though we all have different stories, we essentially share the same kind of mind. I opened, shared, connected. Began to settle into a deeper, calmer place in myself. I have never looked back.

Here in Scotland, we benefit from a rich variety of sanghas. In this issue of the newsletter, we hear from North Star Sangha in the Black Isle, thanks to my friend Maggie Dove. We also celebrate the joy of having hosted six monastics from Plum Village at the Stirling retreat and the Findhorn mindfulness festival in June, which resulted from many months of work from several sanghas. From my own experience, both events were a wonderful and deeply nourishing success.

It's my pleasure to announce the publication of several new books of poetry from another dear sangha friend, Margot Henderson; two of her delightful poems appear in this issue. We also have a thought-provoking poem by James Lang Smith.

Please consider submitting your creative contributions and sangha updates for the next issue of the newsletter. In the meantime, may we be the peace and joy we want to see in the world.

*Jane Ellen (Janelle) Combelic  
True Lotus Meditation  
Northern Lights Sangha*



# What's Coming Up in Scotland?

## Events & Updates from local Sanghas, open to all

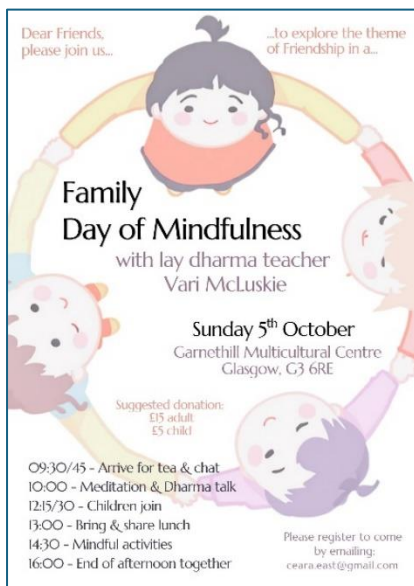
### September 13<sup>th</sup>

**North Star Sangha, Black Isle** - Day of Mindfulness at Poyntzfield Herb Nursery. The theme for the day will be **Listening and Connection** as we listen to the Earth and each other. We will be celebrating 2 Bodhisattvas: **Larry Ward** (senior dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition) and **Joanna Macy** (eco activist and Buddhist scholar) both of whom died very recently. Contact Maggie Dove (maggiedove29@gmail.com) for further information.



### October 4

**Wild Geese Sangha, Edinburgh** Day of Mindfulness. All details will be on the website: [wildgeesezen.org](http://wildgeesezen.org), and on our Facebook and Instagram accounts. (Wild Geese Sangha have a programme open to everyone with regular weekly meetings on Thursday evenings and Friday mornings.



### October 5

**Glasgow Sangha. A family Day of Mindfulness** with Vari McCluskie. Poster on the left, and further details from Ceara: [ceara.east@gmail.com](mailto:ceara.east@gmail.com)

### October 5

**Touching the Earth Sangha, Aberdeen** a day of mindfulness with the theme 'autumn leaves' at Murtle Hall on the Camphill Estate. Further details, contact [Lindsay.Lumsden@gmail.com](mailto:Lindsay.Lumsden@gmail.com)



### November 1<sup>st</sup>

**Wild Geese Sangha, Edinburgh** Day of Mindfulness – see details above

### December 6<sup>th</sup>

**Wild Geese Sangha, Edinburgh** Day of Mindfulness. – see details above



## Retreats

- **October 7 - 10 at Wiston Lodge** in the Borders: ***Love and the Earth*** led by UK Dharma Teacher **Murray Corke**.

We are children of the Earth, we could not exist without the Earth's continued love and support. The Earth also needs our love and support, especially in this time of climate and environmental crisis. If we are to return the Earth's love for us, we have to know how to love. *"To love, in the context of Buddhism, is above all to be there."* Thich Nhat Hanh

This retreat will explore our relationship with the Earth, and how we can come back to living in harmony and love for the Earth. How can we maintain our sense of well-being in the face of the changes this involves?

Further details and booking: <https://plumvillage.uk/event/love-and-the-earth-retreat/>



- **February 26 – March 1 2026 at Burgie House** outside Forres, Moray. Organised by the North of Scotland Sanghas it will be led by UK Dharma Teacher **Dene Donalds**. The theme will be: ***Breathe, you are alive – the joy of impermanence***. We hope to offer transmission of the Five Mindfulness Trainings during the weekend.

Further details and booking form will be circulated later this month through the Scottish Sangha mailing list.



## A new Wake Up Group in the North of Scotland?

This is a message from Ez Yaron, who has recently moved to the north of Scotland

*Dear wider Sangha,*

*I'm planting a seed to see if it finds a spark of excitement in others. Would you be interested in attending a Wake Up Day of Mindfulness at Findhorn each month? [Wake Up](#) is the Plum Village branch for 18-35(ish!) year olds, wanting to connect and share joy and care in their practice.*

*The Day of Mindfulness could have different themes each month and be collaboratively planned and held. Meditation, Dharma sharing, Deep Relaxation and other core practices will be a foundation of the Days, with opportunity for keeping our practice fresh with each others' inspiration. People's gifts and interests are welcome - e.g. there could be space for some guided embodiment, nature connection, and gardening as practices for engaged mindfulness. The Days of Mindfulness would likely be on the weekend (e.g. Sunday) to make it as accessible as possible for people to attend.*

*If you would be interested to attend and/or collaborate, please email [ez.schlossyaron@gmail.com](mailto:ez.schlossyaron@gmail.com)*

Wake Up



# Abenhall is Blessed

Dear Thay, Dear Sangha,

Terri and I attended the blessing ceremony at our new Being Peace Practice Centre at Abenhall this past weekend. It was a blessing just to arrive! We drove from Forres to Stafford in 7+ hours and stayed the night. Then we drove another ninety plus minutes from Stafford to Abenhall at Mitcheldean the following morning. The practice centre is well situated within the beautiful English countryside and in what, we were told, is locally referred to as the valley of peace.



It was great to meet friends in person with whom I (Marcus) have been working and sharing via Zoom for the past couple of years. And many others as well. What Joy!

The day began with an outdoor reception and welcome. Then fifty or so of us went into the dharma hall for a silent sit followed by a guided meditation prior to the blessing ceremony. Six monastics conducted a formal ceremony. Chanting in Vietnamese and English, all of us singing the sutra of the *Insight That Brings Us to the Other Shore*. The blessing

of the water and willow branches, and then blessing the collective, followed by a procession around the grounds as we all blessed the land while chanting and praising Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Deep Listening and Compassion. I was reminded of a Palm Sunday service I once attended with Father Dan Berrigan celebrating the Mass. The sermon he gave was about peace both in ourselves and in the world. At the end of the mass, he then blessed water and palm branches. Then he blessed us with the water and palm branches and then the grounds of the church. Thay and Dan were friends.

The smiling and engaging Brother Resolve, who we haven't seen since Holy Isle, read the Five Contemplations followed by twenty minutes of silent mindful eating practice. We had a wee break following lunch and then a Q and A and sharing with Sister Samadhi, Brother Ben, Dene Donalds and Angie (whose last name I can't recall) in the afternoon.

A wonderful day indeed! And I thought more about its location. It is far from where we live; we enjoyed the journey. The over-riding, if you will, matter for me is all about the future. I envision many people of all ages and life situations coming to enjoy the serenity of the countryside, the fertile ground, the dharma, and the sangha that lives in harmony and awareness. It is already a retreat centre with scheduled monastic residences. It may, in time, become a monastery. Please enjoy what is made manifest for us as causes and conditions have already come together. The Being Peace Practice Centre is for all who wish to experience living, moving and having their being in the present moment and in the dharma.

Just between you and me, I watched it all come together over the past two plus years. There were many moments of amazement and pure joy. Our extraordinary and most venerable teacher planted the seed, and it has flowered.

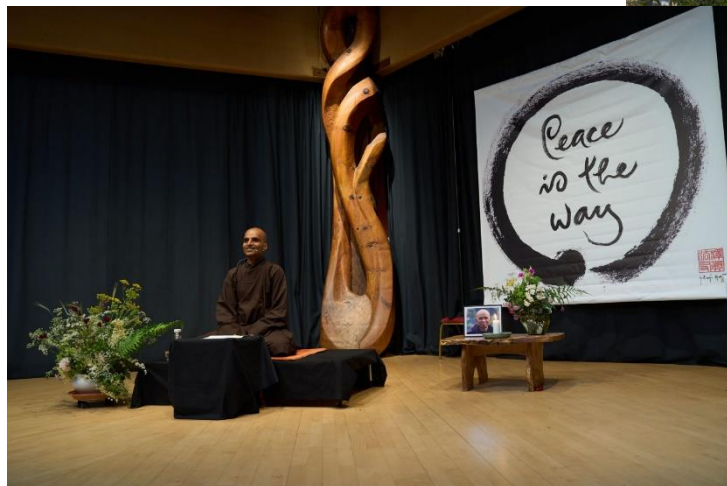
Marcus and Terri





## A photo record of the Monastic Visit to Scotland in May this year

*The Monastic Visit to  
Findhorn - 1<sup>st</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> June  
including the Mindfulness  
Festival - 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> June 2025*



The monastic visit to Findhorn turned out to be a mutual inspiration and joy. The Findhorn Eco-Village Community were delighted to welcome six Plum Village monastics for ten days in June. The monks and nuns also enjoyed what the community has to offer: unspoilt nature; friendly people; an eco-village steeped in more than sixty years of history in this well-known spiritual community. A

full account of the Monastic Visit to Findhorn, written by Susanne Olbrich, can be found on the PV UK website: <https://plumvillage.uk/findhorns-first-mindfulness-festival/>

## *The Stirling Retreat 28<sup>th</sup> May - 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025*

A full account of the Stirling Retreat, written by Sally Day, can be found on the PV UK website:

<https://plumvillage.uk/stirling-retreat-with-plum-village-monastics/>



At the end of May, around 200 friends met in the beautiful surroundings of Stirling University to share practice and to enjoy the teaching of six monastic friends from Plum Village, France.

We were held beautifully by the warmth of the university staff, the mature oak trees, the beautiful loch-side location and our animal friends ... *continued on the website.*



# *Appreciating Scottish Sanghas*

## *North Star Sangha - from Maggie Dove*

In May 2010 I was taken by a friend, John Wood, to the Saturday morning meeting of Northern Lights Sangha at Findhorn. I was looking for a spiritual practice and was delighted to find this group who followed the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.

I started to go regularly and sometime after that, in 2010, John started a sangha, meeting in his house in Cromarty. I joined him and so did others, some of whom came from other traditions. Some came, and some went, but gradually a steady core emerged when we made it clear we were a Plum Village Sangha. We sometimes went over to Findhorn for Days of Mindfulness but gradually started to have our own Days in Cromarty. Some of us attended Retreats, first in Forres then further afield, eg Wiston Lodge in the Borders.

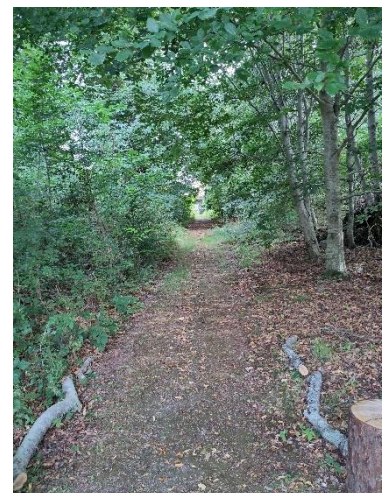
John became a member of the Order of Interbeing in 2012 and by then a few of us had taken the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

In September 2016 John moved to the west coast. As we could no longer meet in John's house, we started to meet in a local church hall sometimes used by a nursery group. This went on until lockdown when we had to get more tech savvy and met on Zoom. This enabled a previous member who had moved abroad to join us and later other members who had moved or were more physically challenged enjoyed our Zoom meetings.

Then in 2018 I had the privilege to take the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and become a member of the Order of Interbeing. In 2022 Jim Monahan also became a member.

At the end of lockdown, the Cromarty Church Hall was no longer available, and we looked around again. In discussing how to meet in future, we realised that we wanted to carry on with Zoom meetings in order to support people who were further away. So we decided on alternate weeks Zoom or in person, and that system continues to the present day.

We have been delighted to find a lovely new venue: the Equinox studio in the woodland by Poyntzfield Herb Nursery. It is heated by an air source heat pump with underfloor heating so is warm in summer and winter. We are able to do walking meditation in the woodland and herb garden which is a delight.



I will always be grateful to the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum village practice. They have made sense of, and enriched, my life enormously.

Maggie Dove *True Flowering of Conditions*



***(This is part of a continuing series on the Plum Village Sanghas of Scotland. If you haven't read about your Sangha in this or previous Newsletters, and would like to, please let us know.)***

## Two poems from Margot Henderson (Northern Lights Sangha)

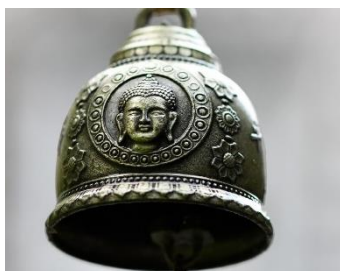


**MARGOT HENDERSON** is a Scots Irish poet and storyteller, writer and performer.

With a background in community education, integrative arts therapy, ceremonial tradition, and mindfulness meditation, she has been working as an engaged community artist and cultural creative for the last 40 years. Her work celebrates our connection to nature, community and heritage. She has just produced several new collections of her work, particularly two books directly related to Buddhist practice. These will be available to buy soon – watch this space!

### **Mindfulness Bell**

As the Sangha sits together  
to practice mindfulness  
  
we smile to our brother  
to invite the bell  
  
In that moment  
he remembers  
that he has forgotten  
where he put the bell  
  
But all is well  
because the bell  
  
being a bell of mindfulness  
remembers  
  
and is still  
wherever he has left it



### **Evening Sangha**

Evening sangha,  
walking meditation  
we step soft as shadows  
in the winter dark  
  
grass glistens  
in the light  
from the open door  
and the rising moon  
  
I stand a moment  
with the bell  
all time converges here  
  
I remember  
this was a longing  
for so many years  
  
Now here I am  
watching as  
the moon unfolds  
  
a lotus reflected  
in the pond  
she writes herself a poem  
  
This moment, this poem,  
this quiet winter dark,  
this sangha  
  
the reply to all  
that ever called me  
here

## *A poem by James Lang Smith (Peaceful Heart Sangha, Rafford, Moray)*

**May you be well**

Then What?

When there is no more

Left from Right,

when there is no enemy

you have to fight!

Then what?

When you have everything

you ever wanted

when there is nothing

more to defend

nothing to your will to bend.

Then what?

When your struggle

finally ends

and there is nothing but

fair weather friends.

Who are you going to trust

you

with your diamonds and dust?



Written in response to an interview of Joan Baez by Krista Tippett, On Being website.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/joan-baez-this-gif>

## ***The Next Newsletter***

Thank you, all those who have contributed to this Newsletter. It's heartening to see that so much is going on in Scotland that keeps Thay's life, work and presence alive. He lives in us still and is manifest in all that we do, a contribution to the world that is so needed at the present.

Suanne and I would love to hear from you, and to bring your thoughts, news and creativity to the next edition of the Newsletter in January, yes, next year. Do get in touch. We will send out a reminder nearer the time.

If you would like to be on the Scottish mailing list so that you receive this Newsletter directly, do contact Roland by email: [roland.spencerjones@gmail.com](mailto:roland.spencerjones@gmail.com)

We wish you peace, stability and joy in the practice over the coming months. *Winter is coming!*

**Susanne Olbrich**, *True Ever-present Stability*

**Roland Spencer-Jones**, *Compassionate Service of the Heart*

